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THE MIND OF CHRIST. IX.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT. SAYING AND DOING

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SERMONS

OF

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

The publication, under this title, of pamphlets by Mr. Clarke, will be continued, with the desire of furnishing serviceable and valuable material for the use of P.O. Missions.

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SERMON ON THE MOUNT.— VII.

SAYING AND DOING.

"Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."— MATT. vii. 21.

THE people of this country, with a few exceptions, call themselves Christians. Why do they so? Not because they agree in their belief about the nature of God, the person of Christ, or the doctrines he taught. They differ so widely that they are divided into separate sects, parties, denominations, each working independently of the rest. Emerson, speaking once of the results of the division of labor, said that, if we looked around, we saw here an arm, there a foot; in one place a head, in another a hand; but nowhere a complete man. So it is with the Christian Church. One part of Christianity is represented by the Roman Catholics; other parts by the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Unitarians. This state of things is too paradoxical to last. It must come to an end. The Church must be one before the world can be saved from its sins and barbarism.

This sectarianism began in Paul's day, when in the church of Corinth some said, "I am of Paul"; and some, "I am of Apollos"; others, "I of Peter"; others, "I am

of Christ." Paul thought it a sufficient argument against such separation and division to ask, "Is Christ divided?"

No; Christ is not divided. Christ is one and the same always, everywhere; yesterday, to-day, and forever. In the nineteenth century, as in the first, he continues the highest example we have of human goodness, the best manifestation we have of the character and will of the Almighty. "The soul that never fell" is still the most gentle to the sinner, and still brings to the penitent the surest hope. In Christ, more than in any other, "mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Jesus is still the leader of the human race onward and upward. Every great deed done for humanity, if not done in his name, is yet done in his spirit. Garibaldi did not call himself a Christian; but when he gave freedom to Naples, and, refusing all personal reward, went back to Caprera with thirty shillings in his pocket, he was acting according to the mind of Christ.

In some things, however, all Christians agree. All agree to take Jesus as their guide in religion and morals; all consider his words more full of truth than any other words ever spoken on earth. The majority go further, and believe that when Jesus spoke, God was speaking, and that we have an infallible record of what he said in the New Testament. Accordingly, what we there read as said by Jesus, God says; what he commanded, God commands; what he promises, God promises. This is the professed belief of a great majority of Christians.

But these same Christians who believe every word of Jesus to be divinely true do not accept many of his plainest teachings; do not feel bound to obey many of his plainest commands. For example, Jesus says, "Resist

not evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever will compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him who would borrow of thee, turn not thou away."

Who does this? No one does it, and no one thinks he ought to do it. To obey these commands literally would be to encourage violence and increase pauperism. Therefore men say: "Christ did not mean to be taken literally. He meant to say in a very strong manner that we ought to be forgiving, liberal, charitable." This is true; but in speaking thus we adopt the principle of private judgment in its full extent. We put the spirit of religion above the letter. We assume that the teaching and commands of Jesus in the letter are to be tested by something higher; namely, the whole spirit of his teaching. Paul tells us that the letter kills, and the spirit gives life. The true principle of interpretation is that any particular and special word of Jesus is to be understood by the general current of his whole gospel.

Now, there is one principle which pervades all the teaching of Christ, and makes the very substance of his gospel. It is this, that the "one thing needful" is goodness; that what makes a man his true follower is not profession, but practice; not saying, but doing; not words, but deeds; not outward assent, but inward conviction. To enter the kingdom of heaven and to become a member of Christ's church does not require that we should profess this or that belief about him; but that we should desire to become like him in character and in life.

This principle runs through all of the teachings of

Jesus. It shows itself in a great variety of ways. It was the ground of his polemic against the Pharisees. They were eminently the "professors of religion" in his day. As a body they laid the utmost stress on outward appearance — doing good works to be seen of men, praying in public, giving alms in public, fasting in public. No doubt there were many good men among them. Jesus had no quarrel with them as individuals, but he was earnestly opposed to this ostentatious religion. He objected even to customs, innocent in themselves, which had become a mere form, such as ablutions before eating, and a distinction between clean and unclean meats. He disliked the use of titles, did not wish to be called Rabbi or Master, and told his followers not to take these names.

Again, Jesus took pleasure in showing his good will to those who were outside of society, excluded from the fellowship of others. He dined with Matthew the publican, and with Zaccheus the publican. If he found in any one a desire for goodness, a hunger for righteousness, humility, and self-distrust, he gladly became his friend and helper. The one thing he desired was to make men better; to seek and save the lost; to cure those who needed a physician.

But nowhere does Jesus more emphasize his great doctrine that the test of all true religion is to be found in conduct and character than in the closing passages of the Sermon on the Mount. He declares the difference between the true and the false prophet to consist in their conduct and the results of their lives. "By their fruits ye shall know them." A celebrated prelate of the Roman Catholic Church has lately told us that it is no argument

against the infallibility of the Pope that many popes have been wicked men. No matter how wicked they were, when they spoke as popes they were infallible. God used them as instruments to announce his truth. This is plainly the opposite doctrine to that of Jesus. Jesus says that a corrupt tree will bring forth evil fruit, and that you can tell the false teacher by his bad life. If his life is bad, his teaching cannot be relied on. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Between two teachers you must not choose the bad man, but the good man. Not that a good man will be always right in his opinions, and a bad man always wrong. The intellectual statement in the teaching of a good man may be false, but the spirit of it will be true. It is not the body of teaching which most helps us, but the soul. A true statement may be uttered in a hard, cold, dogmatic way; it may be uttered in a spirit of contempt for one's opponent, of triumph over his errors, of hatred toward those who differ from us. This spirit will poison the truest opinions, and make them evil in their influence. But a good life must do us good, no matter how ignorant or how mistaken the man may be.

It has in the past been too often the case that the Christian church has reversed Christ's teaching on this subject. Good men who do the will of God, but who do not say Lord! Lord! have not been considered fit to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is not those who "hear and do," but those who "hear and say," that the church has received. It has not asked of a man, "Is he upright, is he honorable, is he generous, is he forgiving, is he modest, is he faithful in daily duty?" but it has asked, "Is he a professor, is he sound in the faith, is he pious, has he been

converted, has he studied the 'grammar of assent,' is he a church member?" If these last questions were answered in the affirmative, they have considered the man to be a Christian. But Jesus evidently believed one to be his follower and his friend who did the will of his Father in heaven, whether he said "Lord!" to him or not.

The fault of the church has been, not that it has said too much about faith, or piety, or repentance, or an honest loyal confession of what we believe true, but that it has said too little of goodness, of character, of doing the will of God. It has repeated the error of those to whom Jesus said, "Ye pay tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, and ye omit the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, faith. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." The evil has been in a want of moral and intellectual perspective.

There has been published a new Congregational creed for the use of those churches which desire it. It is an onward movement, the sign of progress in the church, and as such to be welcomed and commended. This new creed contains twelve articles, and I believe that, with one or two exceptions, I could accept them all. But, like all other creeds, it puts in the background what ought to be the principal point. It says enough about sin, but little or nothing about goodness. The first article of the creed expresses belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and declares that each "is worshipped." It does not say that each ought to be worshipped, nor that the Son is God, nor that the Son and Spirit are persons in the Godhead. It says nothing about "Trinity" or "Triune God." It indeed declares Jesus to be "of one substance with the Father"; but as the Scripture teaches

that we all live and move and have our being in God, this one scholastic expression may mean much or little. This article would carry the idea of the Trinity to those who believe it already; but does not assert anything with which a Unitarian may not agree. For "worship" in Scripture only implies the reverence paid to superiors, and in this sense we all worship and honor Christ.

The second article, on Divine Providence and human freedom, has nothing in it objectionable to any one who believes in both.

The third article asserts that our first parents sinned (which no one can deny), and that "all men are so alienated from God that there is no salvation from the guilt and power of sin except through God's redeeming grace." No one can deny this unless he asserts that he has never done wrong, and that he is without any inherited tendency to evil. Nothing is said in this article of the influence of Adam's sin on his descendants. In fact, Adam is not mentioned at all, but only "our first parents."

The fourth article declares that God has revealed himself in nature and revelation.

The fifth article calls the Scriptures "the record" of that revelation. It asserts a certain inspiration for the writers, without defining its nature or extent, and ascribes authority, but not infallibility, to the Bible.

The remaining articles are conceived and expressed in the same broad sense, and are very happy in forming a platform on which extreme and moderate men of orthodox belief may stand together. The creed may be said to contain a mitigated orthodoxy. The *Independent* tells us that Calvinism has disappeared from it. And surely when we remember with what an iron grasp Calvinism

held New England Congregationalism during two centuries, this is a remarkable fact.

And yet we cannot but observe that this creed, like all that have preceded it, is occupied with statements which refer to speculation rather than practice. It contains very little about the duties of man to man. "Sanctification" is mentioned once, "righteousness" twice, but that good old Saxon word "goodness" does not appear at all. If those who prepared this creed had forgotten all past theology, and had gone directly to the New Testament to form articles of faith and practice from the teaching of Jesus, I think they would have omitted much they have inserted, and added what they have omitted. Let us try the experiment by preparing a few articles from that which Christ himself has said, and on which he laid the most stress.

The first article in our creed would naturally be about God. In most creeds this article contains a statement of the Trinity. But as Jesus says nothing of any Trinity, and calls the Father the only true God, we will follow him by saying: —

Article I. "We believe in one God, the Father, who is a spirit, who seeth in secret, who clothes the lily, feeds the fowls, and who makes his sun to rise and his rain to fall on the evil and the good."

This is from the words of Jesus. The second article regards Jesus himself, the well-beloved son.

Article II. "We believe in Jesus as 'The Christ, the Son of God,' who 'dwells in the bosom of the Father,' and who says, 'the Father is greater than I,' 'the Father is greater than all.' He was tempted, his 'soul was sorrowful even unto death,' he prayed to his Father, saying,

'not my will but thine be done,' and by this perfect submission was able to say, 'I and my Father are one.'"

Article III. "'God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.' 'Jesus came to call not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'; to 'seek and save that which was lost'; to give rest to 'all who labor and are heavy-laden'; to 'preach good news to the poor, deliverance to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to them that are bruised.' The work of Christ is to comfort and save men here as well as hereafter, and to cause the kingdom of heaven to come in this world, and 'God's will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.'"

Article IV. "The duty of man is to 'watch and pray that he enter not into temptation, for, though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak'; to 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'; to 'forgive others as he wishes to be forgiven himself'; to 'humble himself'; to improve the talents God gives him; to help others; to become like a little child in simplicity of soul; to be truthful, having his yes mean yes, and his no mean no; to deny himself and practise control and self-denial; to do to others as he would have them, in like circumstances, do to him, and, in sum, to love God with his heart and his neighbor as himself."

The world of theology is careful and troubled about many things — about the Trinity, Total Depravity, the Atonement, Predestination, and Future Retribution; but Jesus tells us that one thing is needful — to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear his words, and so to learn how to do the will of our Father which is in heaven.

To be good and do good is the sum and substance of

Christianity. These two are inseparable. By doing good to others we become better ourselves: by growing up into all good things ourselves we do good to others. The essence of all goodness is truth and love; truth spoken and done in love; love loyal to all that is true and right. These must go together. We do not really love others unless we help them to be true. Emotional instincts do not constitute Christian love; good-nature is not love; the sympathy which does not strengthen others is not real love to others. Nor is truth really truth which is coldly intellectual. There is a cynical way of looking at the outside facts of life and human nature which never penetrates to the soul of things. But truth and love, when united, make the very essence of goodness.

Wherever we see real goodness, we recognize it as the noblest and loveliest thing in the world. All hearts, even the hardest — all minds, even the dullest — go forth in love to the pure, the brave, the generous, the noble. Such souls change this world from a desert to a garden; they fill our hearts with rest and peace; they bring us near to God and eternity. They give us the best proof of our own immortality, for they have eternal life abiding in them. We see what heaven means when we know such persons. Heaven is in their souls now; they sit already in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. Their life is a rebuke to our shortcomings, our indolence, folly, and selfishness. Yet, while they rebuke they encourage us. It is a "soft rebuke, in blessings ended" which comes from them. It is truth spoken in love. It is encouragement to go up higher. Such souls are followers of God as dear children; they take the chill out of life; they fill the whole atmosphere of our being with a sunny hope. They

make religion possible and practicable, the Gospel an every-day thing, a part of daily life. Good men and women coming and going are like the angels in the dream of Jacob, making a stairway from earth to heaven ; going up to God and leading our footsteps to him ; coming down from God to bring his blessing to our souls.

Thus is our text fulfilled every day in all sweet and tender lives. This week I attended the funeral of an old man whose life had been faithful, true, and upright from first to last. A large number of men and women came together, drawn by the attraction of his goodness, to say farewell. I also stood, in another place, by the side of one who fell in the midst of her usefulness ; whose purity of heart and generous devotion to the good of others also brought around her remains those whose eyes were full of grateful tears at the memory of this faithful life. Both were unpretending, simple, not saying "Lord, Lord!" but doing the will of their Father. All who knew them saw that they had entered the kingdom of heaven. They had heard the voice of Jesus and had followed him, and no one could pluck them out of his hand. They belonged to him and he to them. Solomon said, "Wisdom is the principal thing, and with all thy getting get understanding." Jesus gives us a higher aim than this, and shows that goodness is even higher than wisdom, and makes heaven here and heaven everywhere.

These pamphlets are sent by the Church of the Disciples, Boston. Any one who wishes for more reading of the same kind is invited to write to

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